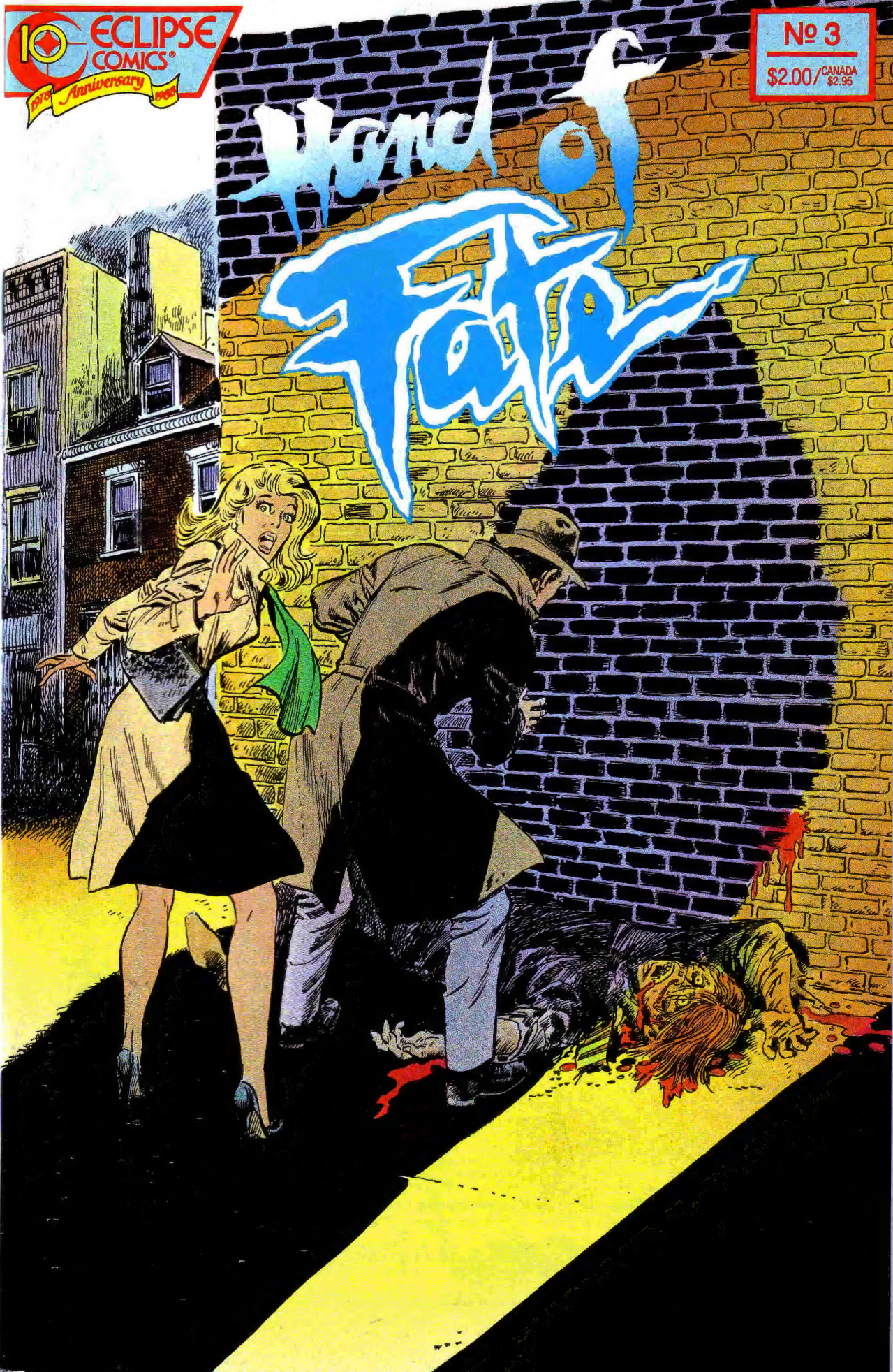

ECLIPSE COMICS
10th Anniversary 1988
№ 3
$2.00/CANADA $2.95
Hand of Fate

HERE, KITTY, KITTY, KITTY! COME, KITTY!
GOOD KITTY! EAT IT ALL GONE, NOW!
GROW UP NICE AND STRONG!
ALL GONE? TIME FOR POTTY.
THEN WE'LL WATCH A LITTLE TV AND PUT YOU TO BED.
OUT YOU GO, AND NO HOWLING TONIGHT!
CAT OUT?
YEP. TURN ON CRONKITE, OR RATHER, OR WHOEVER IT IS THESE DAYS.

Story: Bruce Jones Art: Gerald Forton Letters: Mindy Eisman

AND NOW, HEEEEERRRE'SSS JOHNNY!
I'VE SEEN THIS ONE, I'M TURNING IN.
I'LL JUST LET THE CAT IN AND JOIN YOU.
HERE, KITTY, KITTY, KITTY!
KITTY...?
KITTY? I-IS THAT YOU...?
KIT-- OH MY GOD!
EEEAAAGGHHH!
2

TILLY? WHAT IS IT, HONEY?
TILLY? WHERE ARE YOU?
TILLY? I CAN'T SEE-- OH, MY GOD!
TILLY...
...OH, GOD IN HEAVEN... TILLY...
WHO... WHO COULD HAVE...?
OH, GOD! NO! NO, GET AWAY FROM ME!
GET AWAY! GET AWAY FROM ME! YAAGGGHHHHH!
3

--SIXTY-TWO, SIXTY-THREE, SIXTY-FOUR...
...SIXTY-FIVE, SIXTY-SIX! WHOOSH! WHAT A CLIMB!
OH, WELL, KEEPS A GIRL'S FIGURE TRIM!
HIYA, ARTIE! WHAT'S--
--COOKIN'?
4

UH... ARTIE? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? I'M MOVING.

I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS A BOOK SALE! WHAT I MEAN IS-- WHY?
WHY? WHY? YOU JUST CLIMBED SIXTY-SIX RAT INFESTED STAIRS TO AN OFFICE THAT SMELLS LIKE A URINAL AND LEAKS LIKE A SIEVE, AND YOU ASK ME WHY?

MOVING, HUH? GREAT! WHERE'S THE NEW PLACE? PARK WEST, MAYBE? 56TH STREET? CLOVE PLACE?
THERE IS NO "NEW PLACE." I'M QUITTING. THROUGH. OUT. FINISHED. WASHED UP. FINI. ZIP!

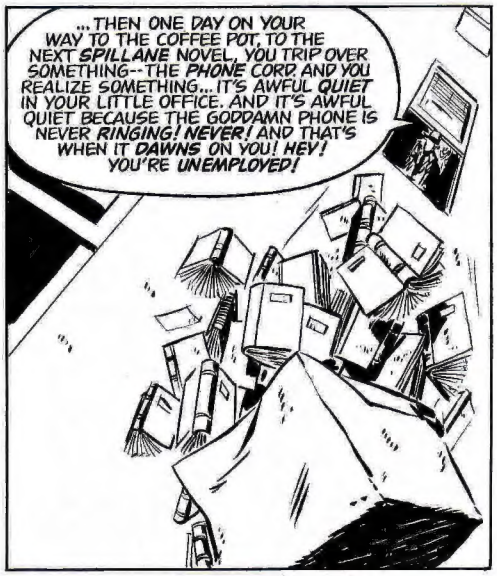
HA, HA! FUNNY, FOR A MINUTE THERE I THOUGHT I HEARD YOU MUTTER SOMETHING ABOUT QUITTING! HA, HA! IMAGINE THAT!
ARTEMUS FATE JUST COMPLETED HIS LAST CASE, I'M GOING TO DO WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE A LONG TIME AGO--GET OUT WHILE I'VE STILL GOT A LITTLE OF MY HIDE LEFT!

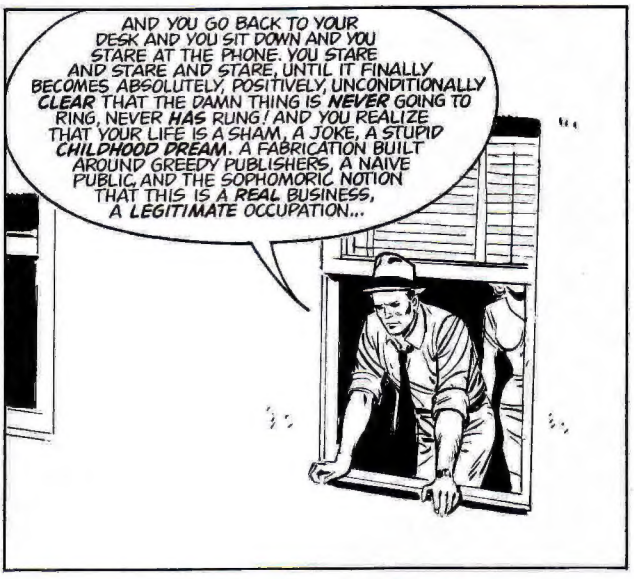
ARTIE, THAT WINDOW IS SIX FLIGHTS UP!
RAYMOND CHANDLER! NOW THERE WAS A GUY WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO KNOW HIS HARDBOILERS! HAW! WHAT A LOAD OF CRAP! I'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR FIFTEEN YEARS AND I HAVEN'T ONCE MET A BEAUTIFUL BLONDE IN A LOW-CUT DRESS!

I TAKE UMBRAGE AT THAT!
HARDBOILED DETECTIVE! HAW! ROMANTIC SHAMUS! HAW! FLATFOOTED SLOB IS MORE LIKE IT! WELL, I'VE HAD IT! LET SOME OTHER POOR SHNOOK TRY TO MAKE ENDS MEET CHASING CLIENTS WHO NEVER PAY ON TIME! CLIENTS HE ACTUALLY GETS, THAT IS!

ARTIE, THAT'S A COLLECTOR'S EDITION!

YOU JUST SIT THERE, DAY AFTER DAY, WEEK AFTER WEEK, MONTH AFTER MONTH, STARING AT THE WALLS, DRINKING COFFEE, READING DOG-EARED COPIES OF ANCIENT PAPERBACKS, TRYING TO BELIEVE IT'S ALL REAL, IT'S ALL GOING TO BE JUST LIKE CHANDLER SAID, JUST HOW HAMMET DESCRIBED. AT FIRST YOU'RE SO CAUGHT UP IN THE STORIES YOU DON'T PAY ANY ATTENTION TO YOUR SHRINKING BANK ACCOUNT, THE GROWING PILE OF UNPAID BILLS...


...THEN ONE DAY ON YOUR WAY TO THE COFFEE POT, TO THE NEXT SPILLANE NOVEL, YOU TRIP OVER SOMETHING--THE PHONE CORD. AND YOU REALIZE SOMETHING... IT'S AWFUL QUIET IN YOUR LITTLE OFFICE. AND IT'S AWFUL QUIET BECAUSE THE GODDAMN PHONE IS NEVER RINGING! NEVER! AND THAT'S WHEN IT DAWNS ON YOU! HEY! YOU'RE UNEMPLOYED!


AND YOU GO BACK TO YOUR DESK AND YOU SIT DOWN AND YOU STARE AT THE PHONE. YOU STARE AND STARE AND STARE, UNTIL IT FINALLY BECOMES ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY, UNCONDITIONALLY CLEAR THAT THE DAMN THING IS NEVER GOING TO RING, NEVER HAS RUNG! AND YOU REALIZE THAT YOUR LIFE IS A SHAM, A JOKE, A STUPID CHILDHOOD DREAM. A FABRICATION BUILT AROUND GREEDY PUBLISHERS, A NAIVE PUBLIC, AND THE SOPHOMORIC NOTION THAT THIS IS A REAL BUSINESS, A LEGITIMATE OCCUPATION...

...YOU STARE AND YOU STARE AND THE BIG BLACK PHONE JUST STARES RIGHT BACK...UNHEEDING. IMPASSIVE. AND ESPECIALLY... UNRINGING...

RIIIINNGGGG!

ARTEMUS FATE, PYSCHIC DETECTIVE, ALEXA SMITH SPEAKING. MAY I HELP YOU?
UH-HUH! YES! ALL RIGHT! YES, RIGHT AWAY! AND THAT ADDRESS AGAIN? FINE! THANK YOU!
WELL?
MA BELL... THEY'RE TURNING OFF YOUR PHONE.
MAYBE I COULD SAVE TIME BY SIMPLY HEAVING MYSELF OUT THE WINDOW...
ARTIE, QUIT FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF. THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU! SO THINGS HAVE BEEN A LITTLE--
A LITTLE! ALEX, HAVE YOU SEEN MY CHECKBOOK LATELY? HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I PAID YOU?
I'M NOT COMPLAINING. BESIDES, SOMETHING WILL TURN UP. AND WE'VE HAD SOME GREAT CASES TOGETHER. REMEMBER THE ONE ABOUT THE LADY WHO TURNED INTO A SPIDER? OR HOW ABOUT THOSE WIERD LIGHTHOUSE MURDERS?
YEAH, TWO CASES IN EIGHT MONTHS! I'M TIRED OF CANDY BAR LUNCHES, ALEX! I WANT SOMETHING BETTER! I WANT THE ROMANCE CHANDLER PROMISED, I WANT THE INTRIGUE SPILLANE TALKED ABOUT, I WANT THE BLONDE IN THE LOW CUT DRESS!
MR. FATE? ARTEMUS FATE..?

...IT'S TRUE MY AUNT AND UNCLE LIVED ON THE EDGE OF THE DESERT, AND IT'S TRUE RANCHERS HAVE HAD RUN-INS WITH MOUNTAIN LIONS IN THE PAST, BUT NOTHING AS SAVAGE AS THIS...!

BESIDES, MOUNTAIN LIONS HAVEN'T BEEN SEEN IN THAT AREA IN TWENTY YEARS! THE POLICE HAVE SWEPT THE WHOLE THING UNDER THE RUG. BUT I'M CONVINCED THERE'S FOUL PLAY. I SAW YOUR AD--PSYCHIC DETECTIVE-- AND I THOUGHT...
GEE, THEY'RE STILL RUNNING THAT AD? I HAVEN'T PAID MY BILL--
AH-HEM!!

FRANKLY, MISS CHAPMAN, IT LOOKS LIKE A PRETTY OPEN AND SHUT CASE. I MEAN, NO MONEY WAS TAKEN, THE "CRIME" APPEARS MOTIVELESS, I REALLY THINK WE'D JUST BE WASTING YOUR TIME--
I'M A WEALTHY WOMAN, MR. FATE, MONEY MEANS NOTHING TO ME. I'D BE HAPPY TO PAY YOU HANDSOMELY JUST TO--

--ON THE OTHER HAND, EVERY CASE IS WORTH A THOROUGH EXAMINATION, WOULDN'T YOU SAY, ARTIE?
HUH? OH...YEAH.

WE'LL BE GLAD TO DO SOME SNOOPING AROUND FOR YOU, MISS CHAPMAN. DOES A HUNDRED DOLLAR RETAINER FEE SOUND REASONABLE? NOW YOU JUST RUN ALONG HOME AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT THIS, ARTEMUS FATE WILL GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CASE!
THANK YOU SO MUCH, MISS SMITH!

ARE YOU NUTS? I READ ABOUT THAT INCIDENT WEEKS AGO. IT HAD TO BE A MOUNTAIN LION. THERE ISN'T ANY CASE!
GOT YOUR PHONE REINSTALLED THOUGH, DIDN'T I?

LOOK, I MAY BE POOR, BUT I'M NOT DISHONEST.
DON'T BE SILLY, SHE'LL NEVER MISS THE MONEY. AND BESIDES, HOW DO YOU KNOW THERE ISN'T A CASE UNTIL YOU'VE LOOKED? I TOLD HER WE'D SNOOP AROUND... SO LET'S SNOOP!

IS THAT IT?
YEAH. REALLY IS OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, ISN'T IT?

POLICE BARRICADE...

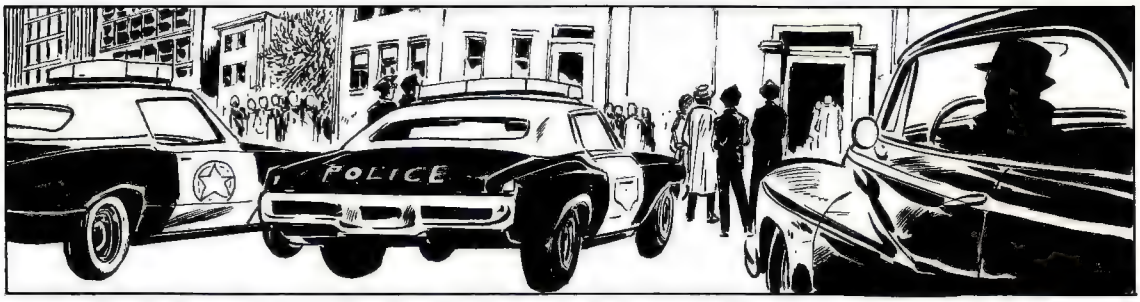
WELL, I ALWAYS SAID A GOOD POLICE BARRICADE WAS MEANT TO BE BROKEN...

ANY PSYCHIC VIBRATIONS YET, ALEX ?
YEAH, I'M GETTING THE SENSE THAT TWO PEOPLE DIED HERE...
YOU'RE A BIG HELP.

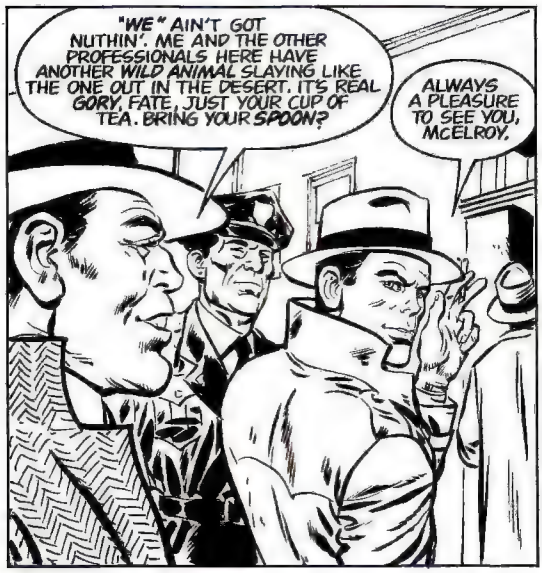
BACK YARD. ISN'T THIS WHERE THEY WERE SLAIN?
YEAH, THE OLD LADY ON THE LAWN, THE OLD MAN HERE ON THE STOOP.

NO TRACKS, NO NUTHIN'. THIS IS GETTING US NOWHERE...
OH, ARTIE, LOOK! A CAT! SHE MUST HAVE BEEN OVERLOOKED BY THE POLICE! HERE, KITTY, KITTY!
WHY NOT? SHE CAN EAT CANDY BARS WITH THE REST OF US HOMELESS. C'MON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
POOR THING IS HUNGRY! OH, ARTIE, CAN'T WE TAKE HER HOME?

SO HE SAYS TO ME, "YOU KNOW, SHARON, YOU'VE GOT THE BIGGEST BLUE EYES..."
AND YOU FELL FOR THAT?
I DIDN'T "FALL" FOR IT, SILLY, I LAPPED IT UP!
YOU "LAPPED IT UP?" WHY?
BECAUSE HE HAD THE BIGGEST BROWN EYES, THAT'S WHY!
OH, EXCUSE ME. GO ON.
SO THEN HE STARTS FIDDLING WITH THE BUTTON ON MY BLOUSE.
AND THAT'S WHEN YOU CLOBBERED HIM, RIGHT?
PAT, I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION HERE... I WANTED TO SLEEP WITH THE GUY!
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THIS WAS YOUR FIRST DATE.
YEAH. SO?
NEVER MIND. SEE YOU TOMORROW.
SO THEN HE SAYS, "SHARON, YOU'VE GOT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BODY..."
PLEASE, YOU'RE MAKING ME NAUSEOUS.
AND THEN HE STARTS TO GET UNDRESSED! AND YOU KNOW WHAT I SAID WHEN I SAW HIM NAKED?
I CAN'T IMAGINE.
I SAID-- EEEEEEEEE!
SHARON? HEY! YOU ALL RIGHT?


POLICE

WELL, WELL, IF IT AIN'T ARTIE FATE, THE PSYCHIC SLEUTH. HOW'S THAT LONG LEGGED GIRLFRIEND OF YOURS WITH THE BIG YA-YAS?
YOU WERE ALWAYS THE HEIGHT OF POLISH, Mc ELROY. WHAT HAVE WE GOT HERE?


"WE" AIN'T GOT NUTHIN'. ME AND THE OTHER PROFESSIONALS HERE HAVE ANOTHER WILD ANIMAL SLAYING LIKE THE ONE OUT IN THE DESERT. IT'S REAL GORY, FATE, JUST YOUR CUP OF TEA. BRING YOUR SPOON?
ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU, MCELROY.

LITTLE LATE THIS TIME, ARTIE. POMEROY'S ALREADY GOT A SUSPECT.
YEAH? WHO'S THAT, SPENSE?

HAVE A LISTEN. THAT'S THE BLONDE GIRL'S AUNT IN THE NEXT ROOM WITH POMEROY.

...IT WAS PETER GILLUM ALL RIGHT. PETER AND HIS AWFUL "PETS." KEEPS THEM IN A BIG PEN BEHIND THE HOUSE. GO AND SEE IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME. HE HATED SHARON EVER SINCE SHE JILTED HIM. YOU GO AND SEE, OFFICER, THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL FIND YOUR KILLER!

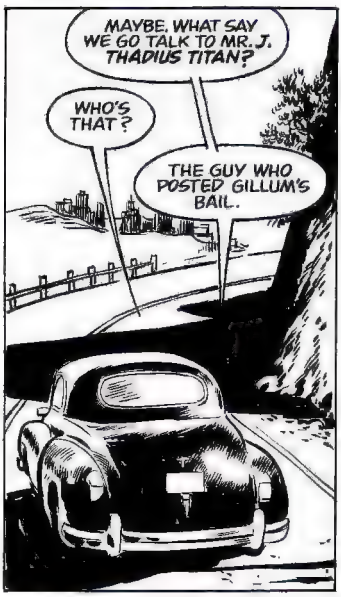
"OPEN AND SHUT," EH, POMEROY?
JUST DO US ALL A FAVOR AND STAY OUT OF THIS ONE, HUH, FATE?

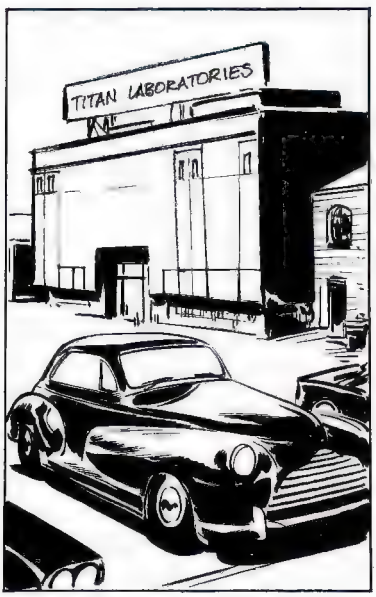
KEEPS WHAT IN HIS BACKYARD?
LIONS, AFRICAN LIONS. TWO OF THEM. SOUNDS CHARMING, DOESN'T HE?
I THOUGHT THE POLICE ALREADY BOOKED HIM.
AND LET HIM GO. SOMEBODY POSTED BAIL. THERE'S THE HOUSE. SAY, HOUSE LOOKS CHARMING TOO.
MR. GILLUM, I PRESUME?
I ALREADY TOLD YOU REPORTERS ALL I CARE TO! NOW GET LOST OR I OPEN THE CAGE!
LIKE YOU DID FOR SHARON SIMMONS AND PAT INGLES?
AHEM! UH, RELAX PETER, WE'RE NOT REPORTERS. SAY, NICE LOOKING CATS. DO THEY COST MUCH TO MAINTAIN?
I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU PEOPLE NUTHIN'!
PRECISELY, MR. GILLUM, YOU ALREADY TOLD THE POLICE PLENTY! LIKE HOW YOU THREATENED SHARON SIMMONS' LIFE THE NIGHT SHE BROKE UP WITH YOU.
I DIDN'T THREATEN NOBODY! THAT'S JUST HER GOOFY AUNT'S STORY!
WHAT ABOUT THE TRACES OF BLOOD THE POLICE LAB FOUND UNDER ONE OF YOUR CAT'S CLAWS? B NEGATIVE, JUST LIKE SHARON SIMMONS'. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY ABOUT THAT?
SO ROVERBOY ACCIDENTLY SCRATCHED HER WHEN SHE WAS HERE LAST MONTH! SO WHAT?
ACCIDENTLY MY FOOT!
GET OUTTA HERE, BOTH OF YOU! OR I SWEAR I'LL OPEN THE CAGE!

WELL, YOU CERTAINLY HANDLED THAT ONE WITH DIPLOMACY.
ARTIE, FACE IT-- WE'RE TOO LATE ON THIS ONE! THE EVIDENCE IS ALL THERE. THE KID'S GUILTY AS SIN, I CAN FEEL IT! AS SOON AS THAT LAB REPORT IS CONFIRMED, HE'S BACK IN THE CLINKER!

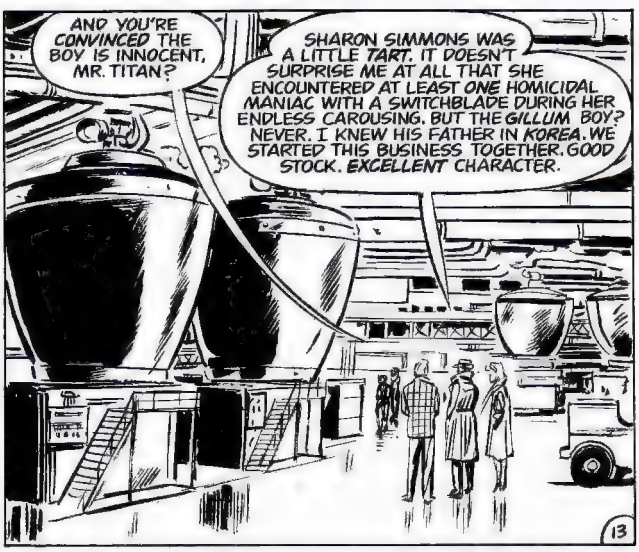
ALEX, WHAT ABOUT THE COUPLE IN THE DESERT? GILLUM NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THEM. WHY WOULD HE SIC HIS CATS ON THEM?
HE DIDN'T. THE COUPLE IN THE DESERT WERE KILLED BY A WILD ANIMAL, MOUNTAIN LION OR SOMETHING. GILLUM JUST USED THAT CASE TO COVER HIS TRACKS WITH THE SIMMONS GIRL.

YOU MEAN LIKE WOOLRICH'S "BLACK ALIBI"?
WHAT OTHER EXPLANATION IS THERE? ARTIE, MAN-EATING LIONS DON'T GO ROAMING AROUND A BIG CITY UNNOTICED! THE SIMMONS GIRL WAS KILLED IN HER APARTMENT! A BIG CAT COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN IN THERE UNLESS IT WAS LET IN!


MAYBE. WHAT SAY WE GO TALK TO MR. J. THADIUS TITAN?
WHO'S THAT?
THE GUY WHO POSTED GILLUM'S BAIL.


TITAN LABORATORIES

YOU BETTER STAY OUT HERE, SATAN, LIKE A GOOD BOY.


AND YOU'RE CONVINCED THE BOY IS INNOCENT, MR. TITAN?
SHARON SIMMONS WAS A LITTLE TART. IT DOESN'T SURPRISE ME AT ALL THAT SHE ENCOUNTERED AT LEAST ONE HOMICIDAL MANIAC WITH A SWITCHBLADE DURING HER ENDLESS CAROUSING. BUT THE GILLUM BOY? NEVER. I KNEW HIS FATHER IN KOREA. WE STARTED THIS BUSINESS TOGETHER. GOOD STOCK. EXCELLENT CHARACTER.

NO MR. FATE, DESPITE WHAT THAT LUNATIC AUNT OF HERS SAYS, GILLUM'S INNOCENT.
I TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT OVERLY FOND OF THE SIMMONS FAMILY.

THE SIMMONS' PENCHANT FOR ECCENTRICITY IS NEARLY AS INFAMOUS AS THEIR WEALTH, MR. FATE. COMMON KNOWLEDGE.
I SEE. SAY, QUITE A PLACE YOU'VE GOT HERE! WHAT'S THAT I'M SMELLING?

OH, ANY NUMBER OF CHEMICALS OR ADDITIVES. WE'RE A FOOD PROCESSING LABORATORY, MR. FATE. ONE OF THE BIGGEST IN THE COUNTRY! EVERYTHING FROM ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS TO DOG FOOD.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, IT'S HIGH TIME I BOUGHT US SOME LUNCH, ALEX! THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, MR. TITAN!
TITAN

WHERE TO NOW?
I'D LIKE TO ASK MISS SUSAN CHAPMAN A FEW MORE QUESTIONS. C'MON, SATAN...

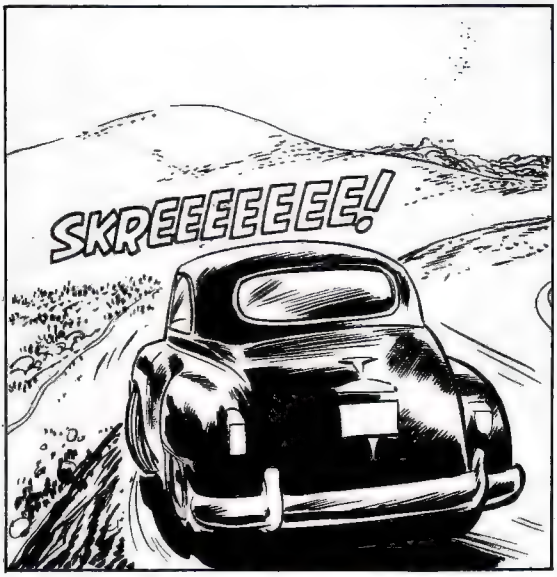
YEAH? NOT JUST AN EXCUSE TO LOOK DOWN THAT LOW-CUT DRESS AGAIN, IS IT?
WHY, ALEX! HOW COULD YOU EVEN SUGGEST-- HEY, WHAT AILS THIS BIRD, ANYWAY?

EEEEEEEE! ARTIE!
WHAT TH--?

ARTIE, HE'S ATTACKING ME!
SATAN, WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

EEEEEEEE!
ARTIE, WATCH OUT!

NOW HE'S AFTER ME! WHAT THE HELL--?


SKREEEEEEEE!

OH, ARTIE! HE'S GONE MAD!
C-CAN'T SEE! BLINDING ME!

KA-RUNCH!
SKREEEEEEEEE!

CRUUNCH!
SMASH!

WHOOOMM!

I WONDER IF THAT LUNATIC BIRD KNOWS HOW MUCH MY CAR COST...
ARTIE, LOOK! HE'S ALL RIGHT NOW!
I'M SO RELIEVED.
POOR BABY, MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING HE ATE.
HE'LL BE LUCKY IF HE ISN'T THE MAIN COURSE HIMSELF TONIGHT.
SORRY, MR. FATE, ACCORDING TO OUR RECORDS YOU STILL OWE US A HUNDRED DOLLARS FROM THE LAST TIME WE RENTED YOU A CAR.
AND I PLAN ON PAYING IT ALL BACK, JUST AS SOON AS I CRACK THIS CASE.
GOT TO HAVE THE HUNDRED BUCKS FIRST, MR. FATE.
HOW THE HELL AM I GOING TO GET IT FOR YOU WITHOUT WHEELS?
HERE! NOW GIVE US A CAR SO WE CAN GET OUT OF HERE!
I THOUGHT THAT WAS FOR THE PHONE BILL.
FIRST THINGS FIRST. IT'S GETTING LATE...WHERE TO? CHAPMAN'S?
NO. I'VE GOT SOMETHING ELSE I WANT TO TRY FIRST.
"TRY"?

ARTIE! THIS IS CRAZY! YOU'RE GOING TO GET YOURSELF KILLED!
YEAH, MIGHT FINANCIALLY JEOPARDIZE THE ENTIRE PRIVATE EYE INDUSTRY.

SHH! BE CAREFUL!
CLUMSY ME.
CLANG!

ARTIE!
SORRY.
KRASH!

HELLO, BOYS! HOPE I DIDN'T WAKE YOU!
YOU PROBABLY WOKE HALF THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

ALL RIGHT! THAT'S FAR ENOUGH!
DAMN! I KNEW ALL THAT NOISE WOULD FLUSH HIM!
EVENING, MR. GILLUM. BIT LATE FOR HUNTING QUAIL...

I TOLD YOU PEOPLE TO STAY AWAY FROM HERE!
JUST PASSING THROUGH, PETER. THOUGHT I'D TRY AND GET A CLOSER VIEW OF YOUR PETS HERE... SAY, THAT'S NOT EVEN LOCKED, IS IT?
ARTIE!
VERY BRAVE, MR. FATE. YOU JUST CLOSE IT AGAIN NOW.
I'LL DO THAT, PETER...
... AS SOON AS I SAY "HI" TO YOUR FRIENDS!
ARTIE, NO!
ARTIE, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
DON'T BE A FOOL, FATE!
EASY, BOYS... DON'T BE NERVOUS...
RAUGH!
ARTIE!
ARTIE, FOR THE LOVE O' MIKE, GET OUT OF THERE!
...EASY, BOY... EASY...
WELL, WELL... GENTLE AS A TABBY, ISN'T HE?

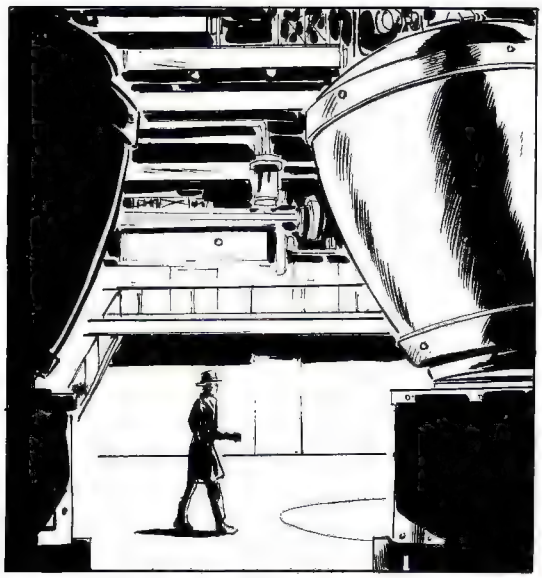
LOOK, I'M SURE THERE WAS AN EXCELLENT REASON FOR THAT, BUT NEXT TIME WARN ME A LITTLE, HUH? UNLIKE THOSE CATS, I ONLY HAVE ONE LIFE!
NOT EXACTLY RAVENOUS KILLERS, ARE THEY?

DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU THAT THEY MIGHT ATTACK ONLY UPON HIS COMMAND?
THOSE CATS DIDN'T KILL ANYBODY, ALEX. FOR ONE THING, DID YOU GET A LOAD OF THEIR CLAWS? THEY WERE TOO BIG TO LEAVES SCRATCHES LIKE THE ONES ON THE MURDERED BODIES.

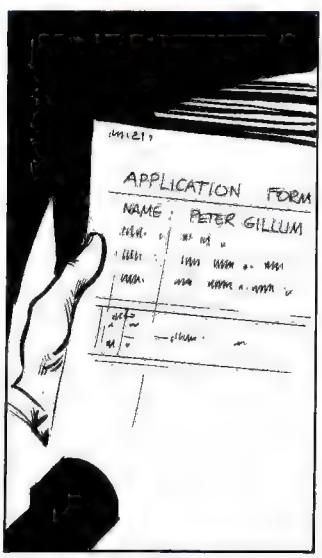
SO WHAT DOES THAT LEAVE US, A MANIAC RUNNING AROUND IN A LEOPARD SUIT, KILLING RANDOMLY, MOTIVELESSLY?
RANDOM... RANDOM... THAT'S WHERE THE KEY LIES...

TITAN INDUSTRIES? WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?
TRACKING A KILLER.

GO ON BACK TO THE OFFICE AND WAIT BY THE PHONE. I'VE GOT PHIL DOWN AT THE POLICE LAB SCHEDULED TO CALL ME ABOUT THOSE CLAW MARKS. I'LL CALL YOU FROM HERE IN ONE HOUR!



J. THADIUS TITAN
PRESIDENT


APPLICATION FORM
NAME : PETER GILLUM

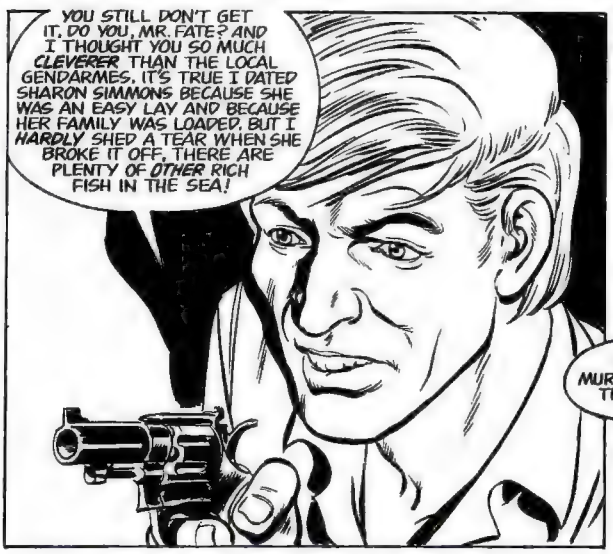
THAT WILL BE QUITE SUFFICIENT, MR. FATE...

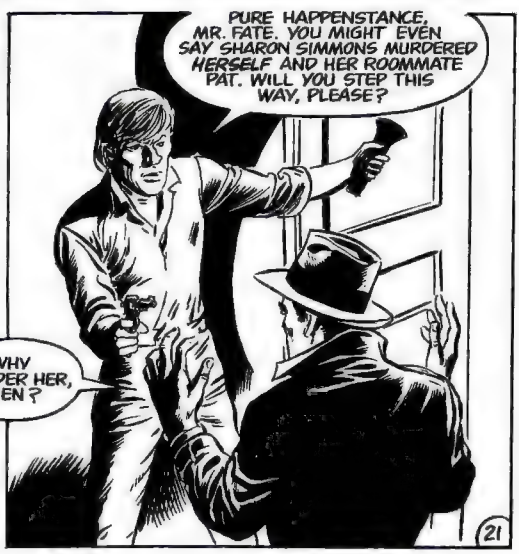
PETER?

SURELY YOU DIDN'T SUSPECT THE EMINENT J. THADIUS TITAN?
NO, I SUSPECTED A DISGRUNTLED EMPLOYEE... I JUST DIDN'T KNOW YOU WORKED FOR TITAN INDUSTRIES UNTIL THIS MOMENT. TELL ME, HOW DID YOU PERFECT THE FORMULA?

TRIAL AND ERROR, MR. FATE, TRIAL AND ERROR. I DIDN'T SWITCH MY MAJOR TO BIOCHEMISTRY AT U.C.L.A. FOR NOTHING. THERE ISN'T ANYTHING I DON'T KNOW ABOUT FOOD ADDITIVES AND HALLUCINOGENS.
THERE'S A LOT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT MODUS OPERANDI. THAT WAS A RATHER SLOPPY METHOD OF KILLING ONE GIRL JUST BECAUSE SHE JILTED YOU.

HA, HA, HA, HA!
WELL, I'M GLAD I COULD BE YOUR EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT.


YOU STILL DON'T GET IT, DO YOU, MR. FATE? AND I THOUGHT YOU SO MUCH CLEVERER THAN THE LOCAL GENDARMES. IT'S TRUE I DATED SHARON SIMMONS BECAUSE SHE WAS AN EASY LAY AND BECAUSE HER FAMILY WAS LOADED, BUT I HARDLY SHED A TEAR WHEN SHE BROKE IT OFF. THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER RICH FISH IN THE SEA!


PURE HAPPENSTANCE, MR. FATE. YOU MIGHT EVEN SAY SHARON SIMMONS MURDERED HERSELF AND HER ROOMMATE PAT. WILL YOU STEP THIS WAY, PLEASE?
WHY MURDER HER, THEN?

IT WASN'T THE LIONS, THEN?
THE LIONS WERE MY *INITIAL* INTENTION, MR. FATE. I USED THEM AS GUINEA PIGS UPON WHICH TO PERFECT MY ADDITIVE. TITAN INDUSTRIES, YOU SEE, MANUFACTURES NOT ONLY PET PRODUCTS, BUT SERVICES THE MAJOR ZOOS IN THIS COUNTRY. CAN YOU IMAGINE THE *CHAOS* WHEN OTHERWISE MANAGEABLE FELINES SUDDENLY BEGAN ACTING MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN THEIR AFRICAN COUNTERPARTS?
PRECISELY. THEN, ONE FORTUITOUS DAY, A *REVELATION* OCCURRED--A COMMON *HOUSECAT* WANDERED INTO THE LION PEN AND SAMPLED SOME OF THEIR FOOD. AND GUESS WHAT? *IT* BECAME AS WILD AND SAVAGE AS A FULL-GROWN LEOPARD! *THAT'S* WHEN I KNEW I'D TRIUMPHED!
FINANCIAL *RUIN* FOR TITAN INDUSTRIES.
INSTEAD OF ONLY CONTAMINATING THE FOOD SHIPPED TO ZOOS, YOU ALLOWED IT TO BE PUT ON THE SHELF OF THE LOCAL SAFEWAY...
CAN YOU THINK OF A *QUICKER* WAY TO BRING AN INDUSTRIAL GIANT TO ITS KNEES? THE PLAGUE OF KILLERS WILL SPREAD *ACROSS* THE LAND, MR. FATE, AND WHEN IT DOES... THE TITAN WILL *FALL!*
THAT'S FAR ENOUGH. TURN AROUND NOW.
SO WHY YOUR GREAT HATRED FOR J. THADIUS? HE POSTED YOUR BAIL, AFTER ALL...
OUT OF GUILT! SURELY MR. TITAN TOLD YOU OF THE GREAT "*FRIENDSHIP*" WITH MY FATHER? DID HE TELL YOU HOW MY FATHER *DIED*? DID HE MENTION HIS PLANS TO CUT MY FATHER OUT OF THE PARTNERSHIP? DID HE MENTION THAT MY FATHER'S *HEART ATTACK* WAS A RESULT OF HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THIS? NO, I DON'T SUPPOSE HE DID.
ORDINARY *HOUSECATS*, MR. FATE. GENTLE, TRUSTING, *PLACID*. WE KEEP THEM HERE TO EXPERIMENT WITH FOOD ADDITIVES. WOULD YOU CARE FOR A *DEMONSTRATION* OF MY OWN SPECIAL FORMULA...?
THERE IT IS, MR. FATE! THE FORMULA THAT WILL *DESTROY* TITAN INDUSTRIES!
YES, AND HALF THE *CAT LOVERS* IN THE COUNTRY...
22

I REALLY HAD NO IDEA SHARON SIMMONS HAD PURCHASED A KITTEN. A PITY. PERHAPS I COULD HAVE *PREVENTED* IT HAD SHE ELECTED TO CONTINUE THE RELATIONSHIP.
OVER THE *SIDE*, PLEASE.
MY ASSISTANT, MISS SMITH, WILL *REPLACE* ME, OF COURSE.
I TRUST SHE WILL BE MORE *EFFECTIVE* THAN YOU...
AGH!
KRACK!
KRASH!
NAGGHHHH!
FATE! FOR GOD'S SAKE! HELP ME!

YAGGGHHHHHH!
WHUNK!
THE BUTTON, QUICK! OPEN THE MAIN DOOR! LET ME OUT!
WHICH ONE IS IT?
SECOND ONE FROM THE-- YAAGGHHHHH!
EEEEAAGGGHHHH! MY EYES!
WHICH BUTTON, FOR GOD'S SAKE! WHICH BUTTON?
PETER? PETER!!

HERE Y'ARE, BOY, SOME NICE FRESH CAT FOOD!
EAT IT ALL GONE, NOW!
rrrrrrrr!
ALEX, IT'S ME. I--
ARTIE! THE GUY FROM THE LAB CALLED! YOU WERE RIGHT, THE CLAW MARKS ON THE SIMMONS GIRL DIDN'T MATCH GILLUM'S LIONS.
NEVER MIND THAT, I'VE GOT THE KILLER. HE--
OH, MY GOD...
EEEEEEEEE!
EEEEAAGHHH!
ALEX? WHAT IS IT? ALEX?
PETERSON? THIS IS FATE! GET OVER TO MY OFFICE QUICK! ALEX IS BEING ATTACKED! YES! HURRY!
DAMN! AND ME WITHOUT A CAR!
TITAN
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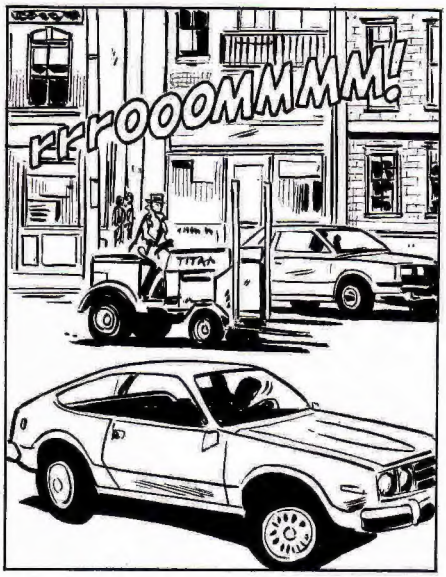
WEEEEEEEEE
WOOP WOOP WOOP!

EEEEEEEEEEE!


rrrOOOMMMM!

KRASH!
KRASH!

GOOD LORD...!

ALEX! YOU ALL RIGHT?
FINE, FINE... LITTLE SCRATCH IS ALL.
THE CAT! WHAT ABOUT THE CAT?

BETTER ASK THE TOUGHEST BIRD ON THE BLOCK ABOUT THAT!
THE END